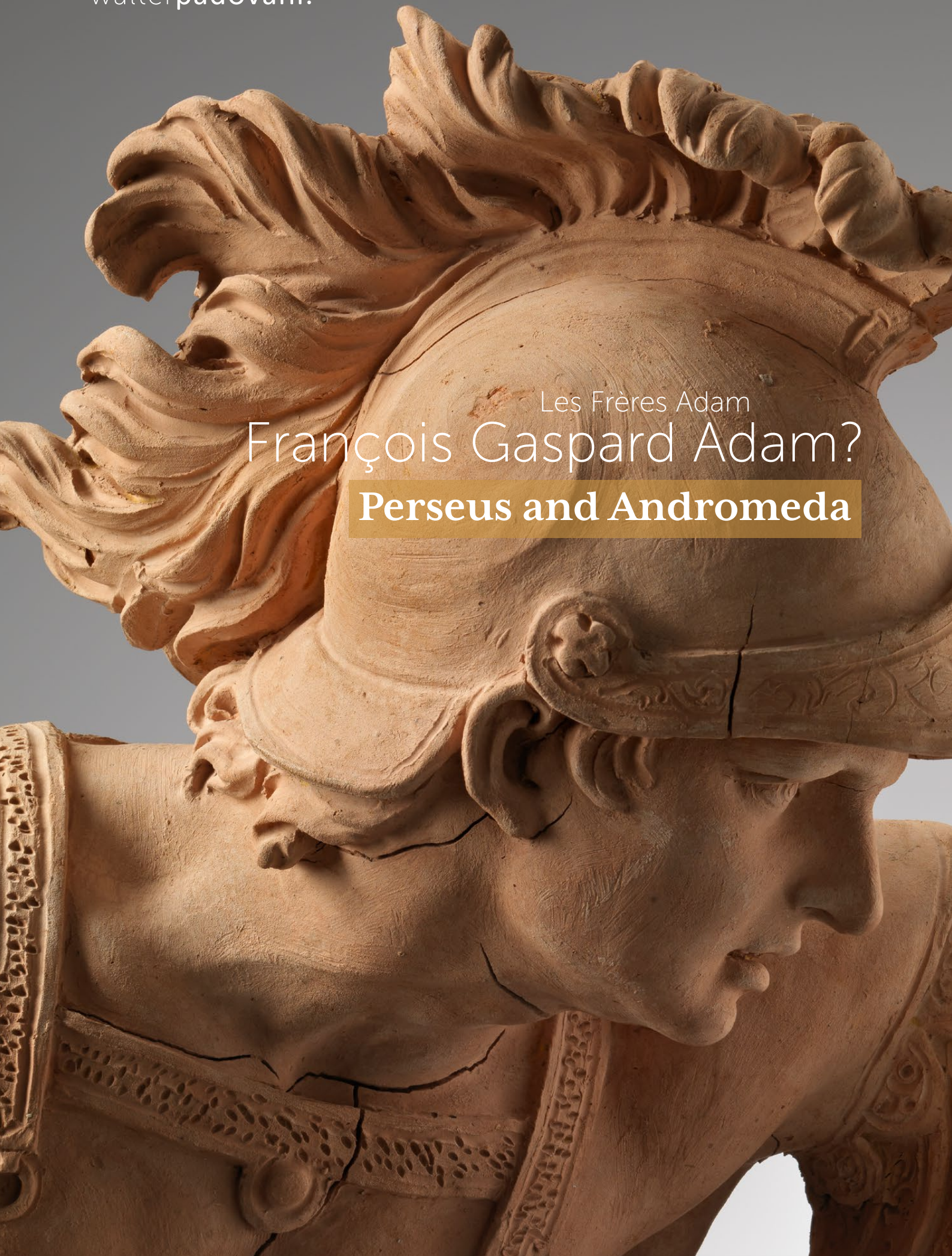


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Les Frères Adam

François Gaspard Adam?

Perseus and Andromeda





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Les Frères Adam
 François Gaspard Adam?
 (Nancy, 1710- Paris, 1761)

Perseus and Andromeda

Terracotta

Height 77 cm and 66 cm respectively

These two superb terracottas (as outstanding in their composition as they are in the execution of their individual details, skilfully balanced between certain parts that are highly polished and others displaying a casual vibrancy) appeared on the art antique market last year (Finarte, 21-22 February 2023, lot no. 53, labelled '17th century Italian school'), arousing immense interest primarily on account of their remarkable quality, but possibly also because of the dif-

ficulty involved in accurately placing them in the context of Baroque sculpture.

With their partly gilt, partly imitation bronze patina which, according to a series of acute remarks made by the restorer who cleaned them, cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered original, they are back on the market today, after careful restoration has made good a few minor chips (and reinstated Perseus's original arms which, though detached, were still with the statue). These two terracottas





1. *The Borghese Gladiator*, Paris, Louvre Museum

are of a size that is almost exceptional if we consider that they are, in all likelihood, preparatory models, which normally ranged from 25/30 cm to 50/55 cm in the 17th and 18th centuries.

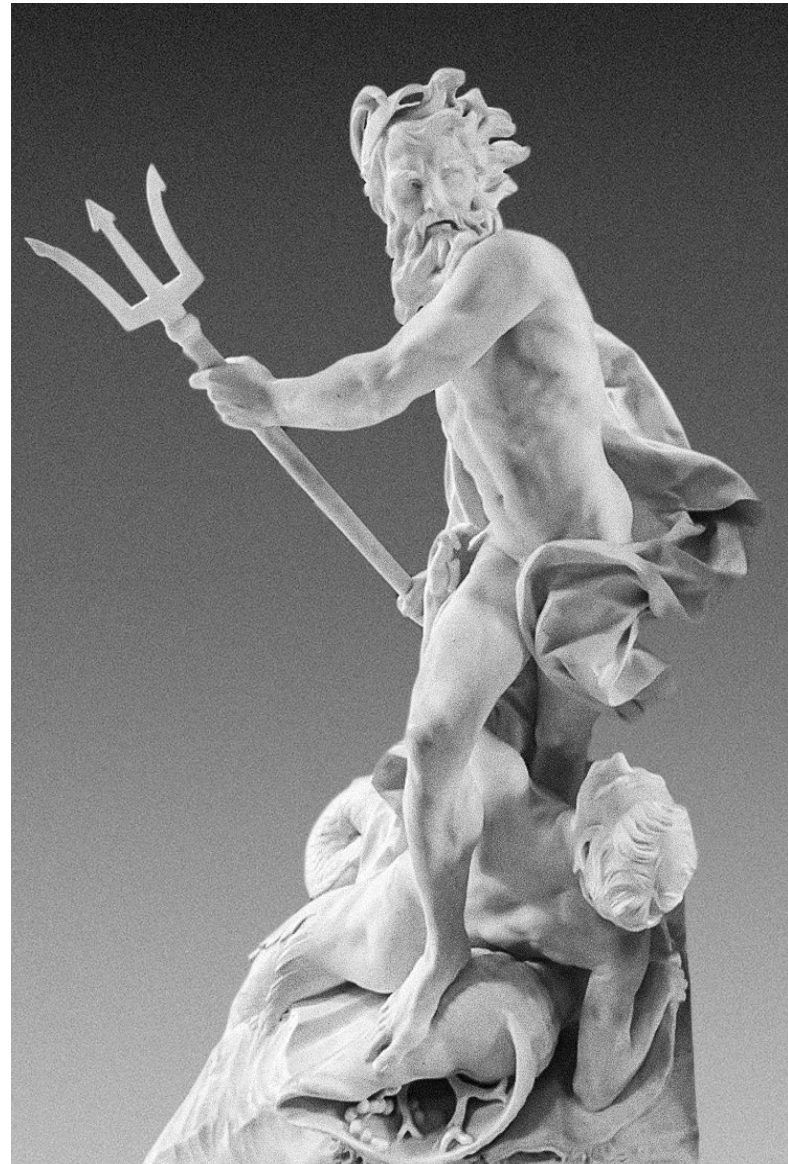
It needs to be said at once that, as of today, the two monumental statues for which these terracottas appear to be preparatory works have not been identified. Andromeda is recognisa-

ble here because she is shown in chains before a rock, awaiting Perseus who, after defeating the Medusa portrayed here on his shield, hastens towards her in order to free her from the sea monster that was seeking to devour her. This theme, with Andromeda close to the sea, was particularly suited to adorning a fountain. But so far, it has not been possible to track down





2. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *David*, Rome, Borghese Gallery



3. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, *Neptune Calming the Waves*, Paris, Louvre Museum

statues that might be associated with these two terracottas, though we need to countenance the possibility either that they have been destroyed, or that they were never carved in the first place.

Thus we have only the two terracottas' stylistic features to go on in our effort to identify the circumstances and the context in which they were fashioned. The '17th century Italian school' label in the auction house catalogue is unsatisfactory on two counts. On the one hand, the sophisticated elegance of *Perseus's* strongly dynamic and dramatic pose speaks of a world that had taken its measure of Bernini's expres-

sive power long since and was capable of rendering it in a manner equally as lively, yet unquestionably more measured and with a more balanced approach to the handling of sentiment. This points to a timeframe in the early 18th century. On the other hand, this very liveliness, this interest in dialoguing with the style of the previous century and in breathing life into a latter-day Bernini, more worldly and less tormented by the portrayal of affection, is basically as extraneous to the figurative culture of Rome as it is to that of Italy's other cities. This aptitude for renewal did indeed first see





3. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, *Neptune Calming the Waves* (detail), Paris, Louvre Museum

the light of day in Rome with Pierre Legros, but it was to be developed chiefly in France in the work of various sculptors, more or less all of whom had spent time in Rome.

In our case, in particular, both the composition and a number of details in the two terracottas' handling point to the output of a family of sculptors who played a crucial role in the development of French sculpture in the first half of the 18th century. The sculptors in question were the three Adam brothers, Lambert Sigisbert (1700–59), Nicolas Sébastien (1705–78) and François Gaspard (1710–61), the sons of Jacob Sigisbert Adam (1670 – 1747). These four sculptors have recently been the object of a major exhibition, held in Nancy in 2021, accompanied by the publication of a catalogue edited by Pierre-Hippolyte Pénét and Guilhem Scherf (*Les Adam. La sculpture en héritage*). The three brothers spent some time together in Rome and worked together on more than one occasion, chiefly in the 1730s and early '40s. François Gaspard was appointed to the post of chief sculptor by Frederick of Prussia and moved to Berlin in 1747, while Nicolas Sébastien was already running a workshop of his own in Paris in 1740.

The eldest brother, Lambert Sigisbert, who was in Rome from 1726 to 1733, was to produce his most important work in 1740, a monumental lead group depicting *The Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite* (a sculpture over three metres in height and almost twelve metres in length) for the Bassin de Neptune in Versailles. Dezallier d'Argenville, writing in the 18th century, reports that several of the figures and various sea monsters at Neptune's feet were fashioned by Nicolas Sébastien (Nancy 2021, pp. 144, 145 note 10), and it is highly likely that the youngest brother, François Gaspard, also took part in the project, albeit in a capacity that it is impossible to identify. We basically only know of François Gaspard's later work for the King of Prussia, while nothing has survived from the twenty or





4. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, *Allegorical sculpture of Water (Fishing)*, Potsdam, Sanssouci Park

so years he spent working in France and in Rome (whither, after initially living in the city with his brothers from 1729 to 1733, he returned on his own for a second period of residence between 1742 and 1746). While the exhibition in Nancy crucially helped to put their different personalities into proper perspective, at the same time it also highlighted their very close similarities.

Lambert Sigisbert has always been considered the most important of the three, while modern – particularly English-speaking – critics have shown much appreciation for the work of Nicolas Sébastien (Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700-1789*, London-New Haven 1992, pp. 105-107). The figure who continues to be more shadowy than the others is





5. Lambert-Sigisbart Adam, *Head of a daughter of Lycomedes* (detail),
Potsdam, Sanssouci Palace

François Gaspard, for we only know the tail end of his career.

While *Perseus*'s pose clearly echoes the Borghese *Gladiator*, it just as clearly harks back to the youthful work of Bernini (particularly to his *Neptune* and his *David*), an echo underscored by scholars on more than one occasion in a youthful *Neptune* (1737, Paris, Louvre) carved by Lambert Sigisbert, who is alleged to have been eager to prolong his stay in Rome precisely in order to study Bernini's work in greater depth. The statue in question also lends itself to a useful comparison with our own terracotta, particularly in the handling of the drapery, which shows clear similarities even allowing for the differences in the two materials.



Where the composition of *Andromeda* is concerned, the statue can be likened to a number of marble works by the three brothers, for example Lambert Sigisbert's *Allegory of Fishing* in Potsdam (1749) or François Gaspard's calmer *Allegory of Delight* also in Potsdam (1749). Equally convincing is a comparison with the *Head of One of Lycomedes' Daughters* carved by Lambert Sigisbert for the Cardinal de Polignac c. 1730 and also now in Potsdam, which is close to the head of *Andromeda* both in the almost geometrical purity of the girl's features and in the vibrantly textural handling of her hair.

The two terracottas' bases, modelled in parts in a deliberately plain, summary manner, can be likened to the bases of several terracottas





6. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, *Poetry*, Paris, Louvre Museum

known to be by the Adam brothers, for example the base of Nicolas Sébastien's *Prometheus* (1738, Nancy, Musée Lorrain, h. 46 cm) in which also the drapery – falling in agitation with elegantly soft and intensely *chiaroscuro* folds at the bottom while unfolding with a more dynamic and tumultuous rhythm at the top – shows strong similarities with that of *Perseus*, both in the low-

er portion, above the shield, and in the cloak fluttering in the air beside the bust.

Turning to François Gaspard, the drapery in his known works appears, by comparison with that in our two terracottas, to be at times more insistent and minute in its folds, yet the structure of his figures and the features of their faces can be convincingly compared with the two

terracottas, as indeed we have seen in reference to his *Allegory of Delight*, and as we can see perhaps even more eloquently if we compare our *Perseus* to François Gaspard's *Mars* in Potsdam completed in 1764, after his death, by his nephew Sigisbert François Michel (1728 – 1811). *Mars* is comparable to *Perseus* not only in the brilliant vehemence of his pose but also in his face, which is partly concealed by a helmet, and in his virtually identical sandals.

In conclusion, it is not easy to establish to which of the three brothers we should attribute our terracottas, in view of the numerous, strong similarities with various works by each one of them. The reason why we would be inclined to lean in favour of François Gaspard is due, among other things, to the fact that a considerable part of his career is still unknown,

7. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, *Poetry* (detail), Paris, Louvre Museum





8. Nicolas Sébastien Adam, *Prometheus Attacked by the Eagle*, Nancy, Lorraine Museum





9. Nicolas Sébastien Adam, *Prometheus Attacked by the Eagle* (detail), Nancy, Lorraine Museum

10. Nicolas Sébastien Adam, *St Sebastian* (detail), Los Angeles, Lynda and Stewart Resnick Collection





II. Nicolas Sébastien Adam, *Prometheus Attacked by the Eagle*, Nancy, Lorraine Museum





12. François Gaspard Adam, *Voluptuosness*
(also known as *Venus Caelestis*), Postdam, Sanssouci Palace

while most of his elder brothers' work is well documented. Also, Stanislas Lami (*Dictionnaire des sculpteurs de l'école française au dix-huitième siècle*,

Paris, 1910-1911, I, p. 16) mentions a number of sculptures carved for Potsdam, including not only *The Triumph of Galatea*, *Thetis*, *Deian-*

ira Abducted by the Centaur and *The Rape of Europa*, but also an *Andromeda*. These were sculptures for which François Gaspard supplied the mod-

els, while they were cast in lead by the German sculptor Benjamin Giese. Even in Lami's day, however, these sculptures were no longer to be



13. François Gaspard Adam, *Mars*, Potsdam, Sanssouci Palace





14. François Gaspard Adam, *Mars* (detail),
Potsdam, Sanssouci Palace

found; and it is also worth noting that, while in certain cases the two figures in a group are mentioned explicitly (*Deianira and the Centaur*, for instance), there is no reference to *Perseus*. These works are not mentioned in the Nan-

cy exhibition catalogue, but further research is going to be required in order to get to the bottom of this, one of the most sensational discoveries in the field of Baroque terracotta sculpture in recent years.



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